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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001853

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10-27-13

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SUBJECT: Norwegian envoy says his government continues to review President's demand for ouster of chief monitor

Refs: (A) Colombo-SA/INS 10/27/03 class email

- (B) Colombo 1845, and previous

(U) Classified by Charge' d'Affaires James F. Entwistle. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In an October 24 meeting with Charge', Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar related that the GoN continues to review President Kumaratunga's demand that chief monitor Tellefsen be removed from his job. Despite reports that the president wants to curb cooperation, the GSL has issued assurances that it will continue to work with the monitors. This recent controversy comes against the backdrop of a large -- if smaller than expected -- Opposition rally in Colombo on October 24. The President's ignition of this controversy seems as much aimed at rattling the PM's government, as at the monitors. Brattskar still plans to travel to Kilinochchi to receive the LTTE counterproposals at the end of the week. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) NORWEGIAN READOUT: Charge' met late October 24 with Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar to discuss President Chandrika Kumaratunga's formal demand (see Ref B) that Tryggve Tellefsen, the head of the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), be removed from his position. Brattskar passed Charge' a copy of the President's letter requesting Tellefsen's ouster, which was sent to SA/INS in Ref A. Brattskar told Charge' that during his October 23 meeting with the President on this matter Kumaratunga claimed that her demand was not meant as a criticism of the Norwegian government facilitation effort, but was rather based on her concerns about how Tellefsen was conducting his duties. According to Brattskar, Kumaratunga then cited several instances (in skewed fashion) where she was unsatisfied with Tellefsen's conduct, feeling that he was taking a pro-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) stance. She noted, for example, a proposal made by the SLMM in April that the LTTE's "Sea Tigers" be accepted as a "de facto naval unit," which had stirred up considerable controversy at the time. Also of concern to Kumaratunga was the SLMM's report following the sinking of two Chinese fishing trawlers in March (see Ref B), which the monitors ruled had been done by unnamed "armed elements" despite indications that the Tigers had in fact sunk the ships.

3. (C) Queried on whether the Norwegian government would in fact remove Tellefsen, Brattskar said no decision had yet been taken, and that the matter continued to be discussed within the Norwegian MFA. Brattskar emphasized the need to defuse the situation and not let the incident disrupt the peace process. He went on to note that Tellefsen was prepared for whatever decision the Norwegian government might take regarding his tenure as head of the SLMM. Brattskar related that he clearly saw this move as part of the ongoing cohabitation tussle between the President and the Prime Minister.

4. (C) Charge' asked Brattskar if the controversy over the President's demand would change Brattskar's plans to travel to the LTTE-controlled town of Kilinochchi on October 31 to receive the response developed by the Tigers to the GSL's proposal regarding the formation of an interim administration in the north/east (see Ref B). Brattskar replied that there had been no change in his plans. He expressed concerns, however, that the Tigers might be upset at this latest move by the President, seeing it as an effort by her to try to upset the domestic political situation in the south on the eve of the unveiling of their counterproposals.

5. (C) REPORTS OF A PRESIDENTIAL ORDER: According to several press reports, President Kumaratunga, following her formal request to have Tellefsen removed, sent written orders on October 24 to the commanders of the Sri Lanka army, navy and air force telling them that they did not need to take instructions or advice from

Tellefsen. Speaking for the government, however, Defense Secretary Austin Fernando told the press on October 26 that the armed forces and police would continue to cooperate with the monitors fully and that the GSL would continue to abide by the terms of the February 2002 ceasefire agreement.

16. (C) BIG OPPOSITION RALLY: President Kumaratunga's move against the SLMM chief came against a backdrop of an anti-United National Party (UNP) governing coalition rally sponsored on October 24 by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The rally, at which the SLFP had predicted 60-80,000 people, fell far short of expectations, with 40,000 people in attendance, although it did clog up the streets of Colombo. In a speech to the rally, SLFP spokesman Mangala Samaweera, a close adviser to the President, cited her call for Tellefsen's removal as being a proper exercise of her executive powers, adding that she was "prepared to use her executive powers further if the people rally around her like today." Commenting on the situation, Jehan Perera, media director for the National Peace Council, a local think-tank, told poloff on October 27 that in asking that Tellefsen be removed, the President was trying to "whip up" additional support before the rally. Perera said he believed there was not much public support for the President's actions, and that she was merely trying to assert her authority vis-a-vis her cohabitation rival, the PM.

17. (C) COMMENT: As noted by Brattskar and Perera, the President's ignition of this controversy seems as much aimed at rattling the PM's government, as at the monitors. There is little doubt that she is furious that Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's peace initiative has been so successful, especially as she sees herself as the country's natural peacemaker (though her main effort at peace ended in failure in 1995). In her anger, she is lashing out and the monitors are an easy target. So far, by not taking her bait, the PM's government is acting in a restrained way. Understanding the tricky situation, it is also positive that the Norwegians seem intent on not fanning the flames and to be taking their time in developing a considered response. Most importantly, it appears that this latest cohabitation scuffle will have no effect on the Norwegian Ambassador's trip to Kilinochchi at the end of this week to receive the LTTE counterproposals, the next key step in the peace process. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

ENTWISTLE